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FM AMEMBASSY ALGIERS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5576  
INFO RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 2650  
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 8889  
RUEHRB/AMEMBASSY RABAT 2273  
RUEHTU/AMEMBASSY TUNIS 7126  
RUEHTRO/AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI  
RUEHNC/AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT 6319  
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 1553  
RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0502  
RUEHCL/AMCONSUL CASABLANCA 3350  
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L ALGIERS 000388

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/02/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [KPAO](#) [PGOV](#) [AG](#)  
SUBJECT: ACCUSED JOURNALISTS SOBERED BUT UNBOWED BY  
PROSPECT OF PRISON

REF: A. ALGIERS 291  
[1](#)B. SECSTATE 29963

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Thomas F. Daughton;  
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) On March 26 Pol/Econ Chief and PAO visited the Algiers offices of the French-language daily El Watan to discuss the press defamation case against El Watan Director Omar Belhouchet and columnist Chawki Amari (ref A). Editor-in-Chief Zine Cherfaoui and Amari told us that the paper was able to support the legal fees of the criminal case, through its shareholders and boardmembers, but thanked us for informing them of the possible assistance available through the Global Human Rights Defenders Fund (ref B). Cherfaoui referred to a recent spate of defamation cases against journalists at smaller, regional media organs and said that they, by contrast, might not have the resources to mount a successful defense against criminal charges. We are looking into these cases and seeking to contact several accused journalists in other parts of Algeria.

[1](#)2. (C) Both Cherfaoui and Amari were grateful for the visit and the support we expressed, but said the U.S. was "not speaking out" enough against the criminalization of press defamation, which they said was "dangerous" for Algeria. (Note: We advised the two of a conference organized for May 2 in Algiers and May 3 in Oran that will offer an opportunity for the Ambassador to speak publicly on the occasion of International Press Freedom Day. End note.) The charges against Belhouchet and Amari carry a sentence of two months in prison, which Amari said he was fully prepared to serve "if that is what it takes" to fight for press freedom in Algeria. Amari was nonetheless somewhat skeptical that he would actually be required to serve hard time. According to Amari, official notification to the two to report to prison could come within four to five weeks, but the final word from the Supreme Court might drag the matter out for up to a year.  
DAUGHTON